

Preface

WHY THIS BOOK? A PERSONAL REASON

HAVING SPENT YEARS STUDYING and working in the geosciences and teaching an environmental ethics course, I have been involved with environmental issues for decades. Through that time, as I have observed how we talk about and engage with environmental issues, I have become increasingly puzzled by three questions. First, why do people disagree so much with regards to the content of environmental stewardship? Even people who share the same worldview, such as Christians who agree that God created the world and commanded human beings to care for it, nonetheless disagree as to the content of “creation care.” Second, why do people, when approaching environmental issues, tend to behave as if getting the science right (or, in the case of Christians, getting the Bible right too) automatically determines what course of action to take with regards to environmental problems? Is environmental stewardship really that simple? Are current environmental problems predominantly the result either of ignorance or willful sin? Finally, why in our disagreements over environmental issues do we seem to spend most of our time talking past each other instead of addressing the meat of our differences?

In my reading, I have witnessed too many discussions characterized by *ad hominem*, where one side accuses the other of ill will, whether with accusations of siding with a greedy, corporate cabal bent on destroying nature in pursuit of profit or with accusations of being misanthropic, tree-hugging, nature worshippers that see human beings as a virus ravaging the earth. In this book, we will see that there are schools of thought in the spectrum of environmental positions whose logical extremes lead to such conclusions but also that it is untrue that we must necessarily come to such conclusions. Even most people (though, admittedly, not all) who hold positions close to

an extreme do not actually believe the extreme. To generally assume that someone is motivated by either soul-ravaging greed or life-ravaging misanthropy is unfair, does not lead to productive dialogue, and makes compromise nearly impossible. (*Mea culpa*: I have been guilty myself of such pigeon-holing of others.)

This book is an attempt to answer the questions I posed earlier by providing a taxonomy of what goes into determining the content of environmental stewardship. In doing so, I also hope to provide a structure we can use in our debates over how to care for the environment. Such a structure can help us identify what we really disagree over, hidden points of agreement, and possible avenues for dialogue and compromise. This, I hope, can lead to a more faithful, fruitful, and robust suite of environmental stewardship activities.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS AND IS NOT

The main purpose of this book is to propose an analytical structure or taxonomy to aid in describing and weighing the different factors that affect the content of environmental stewardship. There are many excellent works on environmental stewardship and theology, ethics, science and policy, politics, and economics, but this book is relatively unique in that it aims to comprehensively (though certainly not exhaustively) address all the above topics. Much of what is in this book has been said before by others; my contribution is in trying to bring those ideas together in a unified framework and to bring to the notice of one disciplinary community pertinent contributions from another that might have been missed. (Note, because this book is synthetic, the chapters do not always work in a linear order; later chapters may presume knowledge not presented in earlier chapters. I provide a list of abbreviations in the front portion of this book and a glossary and index in the back of the book as aids.)

I do not claim to have read anywhere near everything in every field (philosophy, theology, biblical studies, religion, ethics, politics, economics, epistemology, science-technology studies, etc.) touched in this book and I make liberal use of secondary sources.¹ Thus, I am sure experts in any of

1. When sources I quote use a parenthetical citation system (such as the American Psychological Association's style), I generally leave out the parenthetical citations, as my focus is what the source I am using is saying (even if they are presenting work by or ideas from another source). Another way to think of it is that I treat parenthetical citations as if they were footnotes; when quoting a work that has footnotes, we usually do not include the footnote markers within the quotation. In some instances, I will mention in a footnote that the text I quoted had a parenthetical citation(s) that I removed.

the fields touched on by this book can provide robust critiques of my arguments, and I welcome such critiques. The value of this work, however, is not in the depth of its detail but in the intertwining strength of its synthesis. I believe what the framework I have set out lacks in particulars it makes up in its breadth. For the task of fostering dialogue and convergence is necessarily a task of synthesis. Without such a synthesis, it is difficult for me to see how we can collectively discern what should be the content of environmental stewardship.

This book is also relatively unique in that it seeks to speak to two audiences simultaneously; I hope that each will benefit from hearing arguments they may be unaccustomed to. Readers who are evangelical Christians may find the discussion about the philosophy of science and science-policy connections to be new; I have seldom encountered those topics addressed in works of Christian environmental ethics or eco-theology. Readers who are not evangelical Christians, subscribing to another religion or, in particular, to no religion at all, may find the discussion about worldviews (and the Christian worldview in particular) to offer new ways of analyzing environmental problems and proposed solutions. In secular discussions of environmental ethics, I have rarely seen worldview considerations addressed, even though the secular worldview is itself a worldview.

Lastly, in this book I try to critique arguments, not people, and present the arguments of others fairly. When I mention a person in a critique, it is to provide credit to meet the requirements of intellectual honesty, not to critique the person being mentioned. If I use a source in favor of an argument I am making, I am not saying that that source agrees with me. I endeavor to use all sources fairly and accurately according to the plain sense of the source's argument, but I do not claim that that source would make the conclusions I am making using their material and ideas. I also hope to present all arguments in a way that the proponents of those arguments would find to be fair presentations of their beliefs. In my mind, this is a minimum requirement of fairness and love towards those who hold those beliefs; it does not necessarily imply my agreement with those positions. I am sadly aware, however, of my own biases, temper, and weaknesses. To those who may feel my treatment of them or their arguments is unfair, I ask you for your forgiveness in advance.

WHO THIS BOOK IS WRITTEN FOR

As mentioned earlier, this book is written using the language of the cultures of two audiences: evangelical Christians and those who are not evangelical

Christians (both those from a different religion as well as those claiming no religion at all). I started this book from musings about how the Christian church can better care for creation. As I continued to explore the issue, I found many of the ideas I was exploring applied to both those holding the Christian worldview and those who hold other worldviews. Additionally, it seemed to me that while I wanted to address specific issues Christians are wrestling with regarding creation care, I saw that the taxonomy I was creating would be useful to a broad audience, irrespective of what worldviews one held. Given the history of this book, I have sought to both engage the Christian worldview in particular detail while at the same time make my argument accessible to all.

I also want to provide a few clarifying points to help explain some of the wording and content choices I made for this book. To those in the Christian church: I write as a brother in Christ—He of whom we say “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved”²—and it is my fervent hope that this book will help the various parts of the Body of Christ communicate with one another and aid us in fulfilling God’s creation care command. While I set out what I hope is a biblical way of understanding creation care, I also include non-Christian religious and non-religious worldviews. While Scripture is authoritative regarding all matters of life and faith, this does not mean that we cannot gain from comparing and contrasting other beliefs with our own creeds. That insight can help us better understand what Scripture teaches us about creation care, how to obey the creation care command, and how to communicate to those holding other worldviews the call given to us from Scripture.

To those who do not hold the Christian worldview: I hope you find that my argument respects and engages your perspectives and is useful to you as you seek to understand what excellent environmental stewardship looks like. I believe, however, that all readers, regardless of their religious (or secular) beliefs, will benefit from interaction with the Christian worldview. Despite the evangelical church being a relative newcomer to modern environmental discussions, Christianity has a rich philosophical and theological history that provides valuable tools to understanding environmental stewardship. In particular, Christian theological wrestling with the nature of paradox (found in the core of Christian faith in Jesus, who is both fully God and fully human), with the nature of the moral law, and with the nature of love offers help as we struggle with the complexities of environmental stewardship. (We will not be able to delve into these topics in any great detail in

2. Acts 4:12.

this book, but I encourage you to examine them. C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity* is a good place to start.) At the very least, Christianity asks us to consider the impact of worldviews—an understanding of what the world is—an impact secular thought often does not critically examine. One argument in this book is that *all* people have a worldview that influences their understanding of what environmental stewardship entails; by examining one worldview, Christianity, in depth, we may better understand how worldviews in general affect our understanding of environmental stewardship.

Because I am an evangelical Christian and am writing to multiple audiences, I will also refer to “environmental stewardship” using the term “creation care.” The two terms are essentially interchangeable, for the purposes of this book. When Christians talk of creation care, the term “creation” refers to the doctrine that God created the world and that the world is not self-existing. “Creation” does not refer to a particular mechanism by which God created the world. Thus, when I speak of creation care, I am not saying anything about whether God used an evolutionary mechanism or not in creating the various forms of life, just that God made it. Finally, I frame the question of creation care in the language of a command. Christians believe God commanded human beings to care for the Earth and so it is natural for Christians to speak of creation care in terms of obedience to that command and the command-giver. From a secular perspective, while the concepts are slightly different, the idea of categorical or moral imperative works similarly well (though without the sense of relationship with a loving God that underlies the Christian notion of obedience). Thus, wherever I discuss “following God’s command,” those who have secular beliefs might substitute “doing what is moral” or something similar.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Because this book sets out a taxonomy for understanding environmental stewardship, one way of using this book is as a list of questions to ask of different ways of thinking about environmental stewardship. It could, perhaps, be used as a diagnostic checklist to help us understand proposed solutions and compare those solutions against alternatives. Such diagnosis can be done individually, in private study, or in dialogue with a small or large group of people.

Because of the breadth of this book, it could be used as an introduction to the topic of environmental ethics in general and Christian environmental ethics in particular. This book, however, is not written with the pacing and pedagogical scaffolding of a textbook. If you are brand-new to the topic, you

might want to start off with John Benson's *Environmental Ethics* or Steven Bouma-Prediger's *For the Beauty of the Earth*. Despite the wealth of good books on environmental ethics, both evangelical and non-evangelical, I am not aware of any single work that covers all the areas addressed in this book; the most prominent lacuna is epistemology of science and science-policy studies. Thus, this book may be a helpful companion to a textbook on environmental ethics.

This book might be fruitfully used as a reading in a small group or discussion group. Whenever considering a contentious topic, I find it often helpful to bounce ideas off of and engage in arguments with a group of friends. In particular, given the discussion in the last chapter on conflict resolution regarding creation care issues, the small discussion group format may provide a good venue in which to practice mutual listening and dialogue. I provide a few discussion questions suitable for individual and small group study at the end of each chapter.

As with nearly all books, I am sure I will need to make corrections and additions. I will post a list of *errata* and *addenda* at the book's website: see <http://nature.johnny-lin.com>. Other resources related to the book will also be available at that site.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am acutely aware of the debt I owe to family, friends, and colleagues who, over many years, generously nurtured many of the ideas I present in this book. We stand on the shoulders of giants, as Newton said, and my use of first person plural throughout the book reflects that debt. All shortcomings in this book, however, are my own, and the opinions expressed in this book should be considered solely those of the author.

Much of this book came from an environmental ethics course I co-taught at North Park University with Karl Clifton-Soderstrom and R. Boaz Johnson. I am grateful for their partnership and sharing of their knowledge and wisdom, as well as the contributions of all the students in our environmental ethics courses. Karl's outsized contribution to my thinking can be seen in the bibliography: no other single author has as many references. Additional faculty from the North Park Dialogue also taught me a great deal about ethics, philosophy, history, and theology: Ilsup Ahn, Greg Clark, David Koeller, and R. J. Snell.

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To my children Timothy, James, and Christianne, and my wife Karen, I owe everything. Without their love, support, understanding, and patience, this book would have remained my mumblings over the dinner table. In particular, words cannot adequately express Karen's selflessness, love, and partnership with me. She is the "wife of noble character."⁴

Writing this book has been one of the hardest things I have ever done, and the experience has made me more aware of God's strengthening grace than I have known before. Which is not to say this book bears

3. Lin, "Role of Science."

4. Prov 31:10.

His imprimatur or approval in any way, but merely that I am grateful and amazed that He who sends the rain on the righteous and unrighteous⁵ and watches over every sparrow's fall⁶ would also watch over a graying Chinese-American man muddling about on a computer and, most of all, condescend to call that man a friend.⁷

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5. Matt 5:45.

6. Matt 10:29.

7. John 15:15.